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ABSTRACT

This paper overviews the evolution of rural society in Ontario (Canada) from the author's personal experience and research. The paper defines "rural" and "culture" and discusses how these concepts are relevant to social change and the resulting effects on technology, demographics, social organization, and community beliefs and meanings. Modern technology has resulted in the closure of rural schools, churches, businesses, and post offices. Additionally, daily travel between large and small communities has closed the gap between rural and urban life and changed rural demography. For example, rural teachers are now less likely to live in the community; to know much of the child's home life; or to meet socially with the children, their parents, or other individuals active in the community. Another impact of rural change is the centralization of local institutions and loss of local control. In rural Ontario, schools are managed by a cluster of highly trained and highly paid officials with whom parents, teachers, and principals have limited influence. In essence, urbanization has resulted in the adoption of urban values and beliefs at the expense of traditional rural values that emphasize the importance of community life. A form of social action is proposed that uses "community sounding" as a way to stimulate rural community rejuvenation. This effort solicits community participation and stresses local history to reestablish an awareness of rural values. Rural people must strive to develop a new definition of rural by freeing themselves from labels and stereotypes that are impressed on them by urban opinion makers. (LP)

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THE CHANGING CULTURE OF RURAL ONTARIO

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From the Editor

That rural societies everywhere have been undergoing rapid social change is becoming a cliche, and the notion that rural communities are under threat from the forces of urbanism has entered conventional understanding. But that understanding too often remains at a shallow level of analysis, comfortable with hackneyed commentary and superficial thinking. This paper offers a different treatment of changing rural communities. Alex Sim offers us a personal and somewhat emotional reflection on his life as farmer, scholar, educator and activist. He offers an exceptionally rich overview of the evolution of rural society as he has both studied it and lived it over the past eight decades, coupled with a critical look at the present. His observations, though specifically related to Ontario, may very well resonate in other parts of Canada and in other countries where parallels and similarities, not to mention substantial differences, may be prompted in the minds of readers. Alex Sim does not purport to speak about the wide world in this paper but our readers will undoubtedly find cause to reflect on their own milieux as they absorb both the strength and depth of Sim's comments on rural institutions and communities. In one sense, this paper can be viewed as a lament for a social order that has almost vanished; in another sense, it is a call for renewal and revival of cherished values and institutions.

Alex Sim was born in Saskatchewan, grew up in rural Ontario, operated a farm in the Ottawa valley and, as well, a consulting firm in community development. Educated formally as a sociologist, he has worked with community and church groups for many years. Alex was co-author of Crestwood Heights, one of the first studies of a suburban community anywhere. He was on the staff of MacDonald College, McGill University and has taught at the Universities of Toronto and Ottawa. Alex was involved in the
Farm Radio Forum, the New Canada Movement (see Occasional Paper No. 4) and in recent years was President of the Ontario Rural Learning Association. His achievements are many, his experience is long, his awards numerous, his view panoramic and his comments perceptive and penetrating. We present his views to you in the hope that your own reflections on rural communities will be
enriched by those of Alex Sim.

J.C.M. Shute
Editor

THE CHANGING CULTURE OF RURAL ONTARIO
by R. Alex Sim

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Each word in the title of this paper presents a challenge of definition, especially when set beside the slippery notion of change. "Rural" and "culture" are subject to various meanings in everyday speech while in academe controversy rages about their interpretation. In the case of "rural" there is debate whether or not the concept should be used at all in scholarly discourse. At first glance only Ontario seems to invite confidence, surely we all know what the word Ontario stands for. Solid, stolid, honest, dependable old Ontario is no conundrum. It is in the history books. It is on the map. We dig holes in it, build houses on it and live in them. But what about change? Today the very adjectives I chose are biased and out of date. They have an Edwardian ring, evoking vistas of Casa Loma, the Grand Trunk Railway, Sir Adam Beck, small factories, and thriving villages. The four adjectives do not describe the physical Ontario but its former culture. Today Ontario wears a coat of many colours of which its rural elements are a confusing melange of tradition, innovation and crisis.

It is the uncertainty of this new reality that defies accurate description. Not that countless efforts are not expended by journalists and scholars to report what is really happening to us. These bits and pieces do not, however, give us the big picture. I recall the fable of the four blind men exchanging their perception of an elephant. They could only disagree while the puzzled beast continued to switch at the flies, pull branches off nearby trees, without benefit or improvement of its own wellbeing. Ontario needs and deserves more than piece-meal analysis for there is a possibility of the restoration of values Ontario once seemed to typify. Now new adjectives must be found and expressed in an idiom and style appropriate to a new millennium. The process of urbanization and the devolution of power to distant bureaucracies that have wrecked our small communities have gone too far but not, let us hope, past the point of no return. A counterbalancing force I call ruralization is now called for.

OBSERVATIONS OF A TALKING ARCHIVE

The preparation of this paper has given me an opportunity to cast my mind back over the decades to the life I have experienced and events I have observed here in rural Ontario. As well, I have been able to draw on the lore passed on to me from parents and grandparents going back to the first days of European settlement in our province. As I have grown older and have been consulted more and more about those early days I have come to refer to myself as a talking archive. But in preparing this paper I have become aware of how deeply imbedded in my character and worldview are

the attitudes I absorbed in my childhood. I think now of myself not as an archive, but an archaeological find, an artifact. In writing this I have been trying, it would seem, to excavate myself. It has been an operation more painful than I had anticipated.

The student of culture draws his or her data from many sources, from written documents, field observations, and from individuals. In the end individual differences tend to disappear as the data reach a higher level of abstraction. The same is true when one facet of culture is examined in detail. Because this topic is so far-reaching and complex it tends to be avoided altogether by scholars and politicians alike. I know of no major book on the rural culture or rural life in Ontario. There never has been a royal commission on the subject except for a single attempt in Saskatchewan in 1945. This is in part my justification for drawing heavily on my own experience and meditations on the subject. I have no doubt there is a motherlode of data buried in scattered memoirs, poems, fiction, social histories, biographies, oral histories and community surveys. I leave that mining venture to younger persons. As an octogenarian I have tended to confine myself to my own recollections and analysis. There is another justification as well. As an individual I am a product of the culture that formed me, an environment I have participated in sustaining, reproducing and attempting to change. So I am one exhibit worthy of self-study. It is true that the archaeologist attempts to generalize on early civilizations from a jawbone, or a few fragments of pottery. Though I have referred to myself, semi-seriously, as a cultural artifact, I need hardly add a number of biases and personal preferences go along with this particular jawbone of mine. There is a sparse literature on the culture of Ontario, much less that of rural Ontario, an acknowledged obstacle to anyone wishing to write of it. The building blocks of such an enterprise (apart from personal observations and recollection) must come primarily from Ontario's written history, since sociologists and anthropologists seem to be preoccupied with less intractable, more easily quantified, or perhaps more interesting subjects. What comes from professional historians is devoted largely to the political evaluation of Ontario, including the biographies of its politicians and other dominant figures like, say, Egerton Ryerson, William Baldwin, Sir Frederick Banting, Agnes Macphail, Sir Harry Oakes, Marie Dressler, and the Dionne Quintuplets. A thorough search of these sources would yield intriguing clues about the nature of Ontario. Even architecture would provide some hints. Toronto's two city halls invite analysis, while the squat bulk of the Ontario legislature solidly set down in Queen's Park provides a sharp contrast with the elitist grandeur of Hart House nearby, as it does with the impractical fantasies represented by Casa Loma, the Skydome and the CN Tower.

The more one searches for the real Ontario, the more disguises pop into focus. In the past it presented a face of gray respectability while electing to high office such bon vivants as John A. Macdonald and Mitch Hepburn. Now we strive for achieving world class in various walks of life as a means of gaining high status and reassuring ourselves. Yet for every Mike Pearson and Glenn Gould we thrust onto the world stage, we have gamblers like Robert Campeau and the Reichmann brothers to embarrass us.

In recent decades, a veritable industry has produced a wealth of

local histories. It reached a crescendo around 1967 when many municipalities commissioned studies to celebrate Canada's centennial. In addition, Tweedsmuir histories compiled by the Women's Institutes have produced mountains of data that an indifferent public would have forgotten in another generation. Unfortunately, the steady hand of the censor has excised most hints of impropriety which colour the recollections I have heard in countless communities I have visited, lived in, or studied. Like this one:

A childless couple raised a Bernardo boy who remained with them into their old age. After the man died the woman turned to the "boy", now their trusted but unpaid hired man. She said, or so it was reported to me: "Sandy, you know Pa never trusted banks, all our savings are in a box under the bed. It's not right. If there was a fire or a robber, we'd be left with nothing. I want you to take the whole thing and put it in the bank." Sandy as usual did as he was told. He took the treasure, put it in the bank in his own name. He looked after the old lady for the rest of her life, and gave her an honourable burial. Distant relatives or the law might regard Sandy as a thief, but not the local community. When I heard the story, Sandy was the treasurer of the local church.

Understandably, that episode was omitted from the local history. Whether or not it was true, it is a delightful vignette of the culture of rural Ontario as it once was: the intimacy among neighbours, the secrecy, the preservation of its own lore, its conspiratorial silence, and the wisdom of local justice. Even if the tale was only gossip, it probably had some kind of factual foundation and significance as a local legend.

It is my contention that the written material which does exist can be reworked like tailings from an abandoned gold mine by a new generation of cultural historians. In probing into the changes in the culture that nourished me I have experienced a good deal of pain and self doubt. Each change in my lifetime, resurrected now for scrutiny, has been a challenge to my persona. The pain I feel at two levels. First the anger and grief at the mindless destruction of farms, villages, landmarks and the very landscape itself. I know there is an element of nostalgia mixed in these feelings, realizing at the same time that life in those early times was far from perfect, and that we cannot turn back the clock. Still, I resent the alienation and fragmentation that are systematically destroying community and family, leaving our small settlements and their people the wards of the impersonal state and transnational corporations. These are reactions to changes in the externalities of our rural culture to things, institutions, and other people.

The second area I have been probing is internal. I refer to the metaphysical confusion that takes over at the end of an epoch, when truth and meaning are questioned, when words, ideas, and assumptions effectively lose their relevance and legitimacy. At this level my sense is one of personal disorientation, of being divided up somehow between my grandparents who were born in the 1830's and my grandchildren who, if they reach my age, will be living in the 2060's, presumably with children and grandchildren of their own. That is a span of 230 years. Between these two distant realms of reality I have become a shaky and perhaps an unreliable bridge. Yet, ever resilient, ever hopeful, here I am in 1993

trying to understand this ageless elephant, our own old Ontario. What sustains me is the belief that it is still possible for decent people to come together to construct and maintain a civil society. And there is something else. I am now aware that yuppiedom is fading and consumerism with its neurotic narcissistic obsessions and wastefulness is falling out of fashion. I suddenly come alive with renewed reassurance for I have never been an enthusiastic consumer. I don't even enjoy window shopping. Like my grandparents I have been a conserver. I hope to live to see my grandchildren embrace this sensible earth-saving ethic. Such has been my discovery in my archaeological dig.

In my childhood I learned that doing without was a virtue. Later I discovered it was a practical necessity disguised as a virtue. By the time necessity became less demanding the habit of frugality was well established, reinforced as it had been by an austere prohibition of ostentation. There was also an obligation to be competitive, to be ahead of others, but not too far ahead. These values probably persist among farmers and small business operators, even if the vast differences between large-scale family farms and the marginal ones suggest that the competitive ethic is no longer held back by modesty or fear of censure. No doubt the culture of consumption, including conspicuous consumption, is now a powerful force in rural society with the descendants of the early settlers as it undoubtedly is among new ruralites. Unfortunately, the necessity of doing without things that threaten the environment is still not acceptable if it entails inconvenience or sacrifice. It is remarkable how quickly a luxury becomes a necessity. There is reason to doubt the sense of urgency for immediate change is not yet powerful enough to save us from disaster. The virus of greed and self-gratification manifests itself in rural society in many ways. This virus is countered by a spirit of generosity and caring to a neighbour in distress, or to victims of a distant famine or flood suddenly brought to public attention by the media. But the problems are so complex and so worldwide that a personal regime of self-denial appears inconsequential.

THE MEANING OF KEY WORDS

In looking at my title, I am aware that Ontario as a concept is a good deal more concrete than either rural or culture. Rural is a word that has been steadily losing currency. There seems to be an assumption that everyone out there in the country has been urbanized. In fact there are all sorts of ludicrous manoeuvres to avoid the word rural altogether. Here are a few: "hinterland", "non-metropolitan", "non-urban", "regional city", even "micropolis". Meanwhile in everyday speech "rural" is a synonym for "farm", which is another word increasingly difficult to define. For instance, there are rural townships in Ontario without a single commercial farm. At times I succumb to a paranoiac conclusion that rural areas are victims of urban imperialism. If a thing or place has no name, it ceases to exist in the collective consciousness. As a consequence, city people, by ignoring the distinctiveness of rural culture, can quite comfortably proceed to appropriate the hinterland as a place in which to play , dump garbage and generally use. With their majority in the legislature they can regulate the use of a finite resource, our land, permitting it to be bought, sold and desecrated. These

depredations are duplicated by the market-oriented activity of agribusiness where environmental damages and health hazards are not calculated in the cost of production. All of this is justified by the fiction that the action taken, since legal, is in the public interest.

I speak with strong feeling. This is an emotion native people understand only too well. In these transactions the pejoratives "hick" and "rube" lie just beneath the skin of polite discourse, less virulent perhaps than racism and sexism but there nonetheless. These attitudes colour disputes about land use and environmental contamination. If in rural areas there is to be a counter-balancing force to resist overwhelming incursions of urban values and bureaucratic power, the word "rural" must acquire a new meaning. Rural people themselves must help to develop a new definition of "rural" by freeing themselves from labels and stereotypes that are impressed on them by traditions that are no longer valid and by urban opinion-makers.

Let us now examine "culture". It too is endowed with many meanings. As a sociological concept it originated in studies of small, isolated relatively stable societies. To say the least, it presents methodological challenges when applied to a large-scale industrial society with its myriad of loosely integrated sub-groups, in contrast to highly integrated societies which pioneer anthropologists identified as "cultures". Ontario is loosely structured, a place in constant flux and crisis. It contains numberless marginal groups and alienated persons. Rural Ontario is part of a complex web of national and international social and economic systems. Yet it is only marginally apart from them, a factor that makes it difficult to identify it as a separate entity. In spite of problems of definition, I believe there is something here in Ontario, let us call it a culture, within which a rural component can be identified. It is going through a series of rapid transitions. Is it a functioning culture or is it a culture in shambles? Is it possible some elements of a rural tradition survive that can be the foundation of a regenerated culture? As I ponder these questions I think of native cultures, their people subjected to terrible repression, disease and disenfranchisement for over 200 years. Yet we now behold a sort of renaissance occurring right across the country. A similar resurgence in rural Ontario, if it can be brought about, would enrich both the cities and the countryside. This new reality must have a name before its emergence can be completed - not the hinterland of a city, but its essential partner, not a micropolis or some such faddish label. Call it "rural", an appropriate title containing layers of myth and tradition ready to receive fresh increments of dream and innovation.

No one who has lived in Ontario for any length of time can avoid the conclusion that life has changed and is still changing rapidly. As for rural Ontario, even a cursory ride through the countryside or along the main street of small towns impresses us with change. Others like me, with long memories, can document from our own experience the changes in rural culture. The problem is to establish how deep these currents of change run in the psyche of the inhabitants of rural space.

As a definition for "culture" suffice it to say that culture is present reality infused with selected and neglected aspects of tradition.

It takes in all of society, its material culture, its tools, artifacts and technology. It also includes the way that society is organized, its rules, its institutions, its customs, the way people are expected to behave, the way they do behave. It includes conformity and deviance alike. Culture also includes the overarching beliefs and values that provide motivation, explain and justify our existence in the world in which we live. Culture can be identified by themes that somehow permeate everything we do, say, think, and believe. As one of my anthropology professors put it, "Culture is the isness of a society".

Such an inclusive concept, one that encompasses everything, every act and the whole ebb and flow of fad and opinion, does not lend itself readily to grasping and understanding a complex rapidly changing society. Nor is it eased much when we put rural Ontario under the glass. In searching for some kind of rural reality we can expect to find not a single system of ideas and practices but a collage of sub-cultures. Some are synchronized with outside tides of opinion on topics like abortion, animal rights, dietary fads, attitudes to pesticides, homosexuality, and child care; some isolated, like Mennonite settlements, extended families and native reserves; and some within municipalities locked in deadly combat on issues of land use and planning.

Just as Ontario is attached, through myriad threads of influence, to the global village, yet still retains its name, character and history, so its rural sectors are connected and distinct within Ontario and beyond. I refer to "sectors" since there are several easily identifiable regions in rural Ontario. There are the river valleys like the Ottawa and the Grand. Significantly, I omit rivers of the north I know nothing of. Yet, they have a history and support non-urban, resource-based cultures that are in a sense rural and deserving more than passing comment. There is identification by the counties (and districts of the north) which have names, histories and individual characteristics. In my case, Egremont Township, Grey County and the Saugeen River evoke strong emotional responses. Yet, they are important strands in the total piece we call Ontario. There is so much diversity in Ontario that one is tempted to give up rather than struggle to create a composite image of the whole. Professor W.J. Keith, after reading, it seems, almost every poem, novel and essay on his adopted province, throws up his hands. "I make no apology", he exclaims in the final chapter of Literary Images of Ontario, "for my unique, necessarily limited viewpoint. This can only be my book, selective and imperfect; but no one can write a comprehensively adequate book about Ontario."

One strategy to simplify the task of identifying culture in a complex, changing society is to isolate the themes or commonly held assumptions that permeate the whole and connect its parts.

CHANGE AS A CULTURAL THEME

In the swift flow of events change is the theme-song of rural Ontario. Change innovates and creates as well as selects and discards aspects of our traditions and inheritance. Without attempting to separate cause and effect, it is easy to see how technology, social and economic

arrangements, even our hopes and dreams, are affected by change. As it changes, culture is busy reproducing itself in the socialization of children and immigrants, as well as in the continuous resocialization of most adults, notably most parents. As things and standards change, so do we, as I can testify with some discomfort. The forces of change remodel at every age level their human agents very much as they refit machines lest either fall into a state of obsolescence or lest these adjustments fail to synchronize. It seems to me that these endless adjustments have the quirky effect of giving both pain and pleasure. Today life in Ontario is a roller coaster ride, with laborious ascents and scary descents.

I think most of us fervently believe in "change", a concept which once enjoyed the more optimistic label of "progress". For surely we embrace change because it is expected to improve our lot, even though we often fear the loss of cherished and familiar routines. Deep down we still believe in progress, witness the panic when zero growth, or zero anything is recommended or predicted. At the same time, there is a longing for stability, for what we choose to remember is the good of the old days. Our attitude to change is ambivalent. We fear the unknown but are intrigued by a new gadget or a new experience. Above all we refuse to calculate or to assume the responsibility of paying the inevitable cost.

Rural Ontario is not immune to these contradictions. Indeed, ambivalence is often a characteristic of cultures in process of rapid change. For instance, we honour military heroes but punish those who murder. Cultures like the human psyche, as Karl Jung put it, have a dark or evil side as well as a bright or good one. Our rural culture is no exception. We must try to identify its bimodalities, its two sidedness, its contradictions.

The inroads of change can be charted on the various fronts that characterize our rural culture - its technology, demographics, social organization, and its framework of ideas, beliefs, and meanings. Since rural Ontario is our concern it should not be surprising if we note the impact of change on these fronts, and on the landscape itself.

TECHNOLOGY GENERATES CHANGE

Technological change in rural Ontario can be traced to the solitary axeman chopping out a clearing for his first log cabin. Then with the crosscut saw two workers were needed. With the broad axe timbers were shaped for the barn-raising where the whole neighbourhood was recruited to help. The gas engine and the circular saw called for group participation at the wood bees in order to amass sufficient firewood for cooking and heating. As rural electrification and oil brought in energy from distant sources, personal face-to-face contact and group effort diminished. Now with the chain saw we have come full circle with the solitary worker back in the woods again. But now that woodsman is part of a complex division of labour. The manufacturing and marketing of the chain saw and the fuel it consumes involve hundreds of people he will never see. The logs he sells will go to build houses he will never visit as friend and neighbour.

There is a difference between the pioneer axeman and the contemporary

operator of a chainsaw; it has to do with the amount of autonomy they separately enjoy. The former is carving space for himself, his family and future generations. Together with his neighbours he shapes a community with a church and school. The latter is an insignificant cog in a complex market-oriented world. He can't eat pulpwood or fence posts nor determine either their value or the cost of his tools. He and his wife have little personal autonomy and limited political clout. Moreover, they can not promise their children improvements and opportunities as they grow up. Families, including those with farms, are assailed by doubts, yet they are endowed with a complex technology. The pioneers had fewer tools, more autonomy, and more optimism.

What is significant is that each new tool changes the way people relate. It changes the individual's self image, and his or her view of the universe. In harmony with the tools available the social arrangements in rural Ontario moved from solitary worker to group enterprise then back to the solitary worker again. This sequence can be illustrated with harvesting techniques. The change fluctuates from the individual with the cradle and the flail threshing on the barn floor to the binder and threshing machine calling for group effort, then to individualism again with the harvest combines threshing grains in all probability for foreign markets. This in contrast to earlier times when much of the local produce was exchanged and consumed locally. We could explore similar transformations in the internal combustion engine ranging from the one cylinder model with its heavy flywheels used for simple tasks of pumping water and sawing wood on to the 150 horsepower tractor, air conditioned and equipped with radio and cellular telephone. Then we could move to the small engine mounted on the chain saw and other portable machines.

The increase in the number and range of types in the mechanical realm, not forgetting rural electrification, resulted in increased production and higher capitalization of production units in all the extractive industries, in which I include farming, given the extent of soil depletion. In Ontario fewer farm workers were required as processing moved off the farm into factories to manufacture butter, meat, cheese, potato chips. Each change in my lifetime has tended to isolate the individual family on the farm from neighbours. Relationships in home and community have changed most significantly in authority exercised by parents and kin, in the roles, and expectations of women, and the orientation of youth to employment (if any), as well as to style and taste. It is true that travel and the media have allowed for contact with distant places and people but that contact is fleeting, episodic and impersonal. There has been a corresponding increase in vulnerability to decisions of government (local and foreign) and to the policies of transnational corporations. There are no town meetings in the Global Village. No elections. No votes.

Everywhere, in Ontario and abroad, farm population declined because of new techniques of production. Eventually the rural non-farm population began to grow because of new methods of transportation. But has the technology changed attitudes and behaviour? No doubt it has at a superficial level, yet to me there has been remarkably little change at a deeper level of consciousness. From early pioneer days up to the present the individual ownership of land has been continuous even though

expropriation procedures and zoning regulations have weakened the obsession with private property. If we examine the attitude to trees there seems to be a continuing belief that it is acceptable, indeed an inalienable right to cut trees down without any thought of public interest or an obligation towards replacement. My grandfather hated trees, although he made an exception for the apple for he planted and tended a large orchard. When I see bulldozers rooting out fence rows, or levelling off space for a sub-division, I am reminded how persistent ideas can be, how resistant to change some values are even through several generations of technological change. As an illustration of the persistence of values and the contradictions adhered to by my grandfather I need go no farther than my own attitudes. I think of myself as a conservationist. I have always planted trees on the farm properties I have owned and on the home farm in Grey County. In spite of this, I know that whenever I look at a fine big tree whether in forest or park I find myself calculating how many logs and how many board feet it would yield.

In the field of communication far-reaching trends can be seen. In pioneer days rural mail delivery closed down post offices which were spaced about three to four miles apart. With these closures the small hamlet disappeared with its store, saw-mill, blacksmith shop, church and school. The telephone came next. It reduced visiting between relatives and neighbours. At the same time frequency of contact among scattered kin may have increased, even if party lines shared by neighbours down the road reduced privacy. The advent of private lines and increased use of long distance have enlarged the circle of contacts. Incidentally, the introduction of automatic switching eliminated the local operator who knew all the subscribers (and in some cases all about them). The automobile, when it came, reduced roadside gossip, for with horse-drawn vehicles it was considered good manners to stop for an exchange of greetings and news. The automobile, of course, had multiple effects on many fronts. It caused the closing of still more hamlets, created the Saturday night town, changed courtship and dating practices, altered the death rate through accident and pollution, and kept emergency wards busy on Saturday night in small town hospitals. It has also contributed to global warming with incalculable effects on everyone including those who do not own a car.

Then we welcomed television with open arms, an innovation with some benefit but also disturbing psychological effects. Now it is the computer that is eagerly adopted because of the obvious or promised benefits to competitiveness and productivity. What is largely absent is any calculation of the possible negative effects and costs even when common sense would suggest that the health, social and psychological effects could be devastating. Even if negative results from the spread of computer technology could be reliably predicted, I can conceive of no authority with sufficient power to halt or slow down its spread. Such is our subservience to machines and to those who market them. Such is our faith in science that it will develop an antidote, easy to swallow, to offset negative results. Such is the culture of the global village into which rural Ontario has been integrated.

Up to now I have skirted around the changes in agriculture in this province, a sector usually depicted as in economic crisis, as it undoubtedly is for many farm families. In fact banks, churches, farm

implement companies, agricultural colleges, farm organizations, and all those servicing farmers have felt the impact of changes in farming, in the reduction in farm numbers, and in the differences in marketing and servicing strategies that have emerged. The economic aspects of this crisis have been well documented, even if there is no agreement on what brought it about, or on how to deal with it. In the ensuing search for cause and blame the cultural dimensions of these changes are usually ignored.

While the proliferation of mechanical modes of communication has effected massive changes in our rural culture, no single item has been more decisive than salt in transforming life in the country. Salt and its colleague the snowplough have kept the wheels turning all winter on our highways and back concessions. Until the advent of salt, the roads were blocked after a few early snow storms. Then the reliable horse was harnessed to sleigh and cutter, travel slowed down to a walk or at best to a trot. This kept business and social life confined to small centres. Travel by train was still the order of the day. School buses were unheard of and the one room school was as yet unchallenged.

Once winter roads were kept open the year round, school consolidation and the ubiquitous school bus soon followed. The general store at the county crossroads and other services offered there soon fell into decline and most of them disappeared. A parade of closures then followed - schools, churches, places of business, post offices; that parade is still going on. At the same time, local residents began to commute to jobs outside the immediate community. Others moved in but to work and maintain attachments elsewhere, courtesy of the automobile and salt. The result has been an evisceration of the kind of community relationship which characterized the pioneer days up to the advent of open roads in winter.

There is a growing consensus that the automobile is a threat to our survival on this planet. There may be a small measure of comfort in knowing that King Salt is doing its best every winter to destroy through corrosion and collision the machine it has done so much to promote.

However far we carry our investigation of the proliferation and complexity of modern technology and its impact on rural Ontario, there seems to me to be one unalterable assumption. I refer to the unblinking and uncritical belief that the machine has been and can be the means of improving the quality of life. When I refer to machine I include every item in our material culture from safety pins and teflon irons to atomic energy. The machine promises to unfold new miracles in the future from which we or people like us expect to benefit. Sometimes I ask myself why we so confidently expect benefits when the evidence is so often to the contrary or do we simply delight in gadgets for their own fascinating sakes? In this secular age this faith seems to contain a promise of paradise, not only for us but for future generations. Yet we fecklessly incur staggering debts (personal, corporate and state) in the pursuit of material benefit. As we know, every culture has its sacred objects to satisfy a need for something or someone to worship. Not everyone would agree it is the machine but have they ever been to a motor show or a boat show or noticed the Sunday morning ritual of a neighbour down on his knees polishing the family car? Actually that Sunday ritual is gradually

disappearing as we now have machines to wash and polish our automobiles - machines cleaning machines in a ritual verging on total immersion as we sit inside to share the act of being cleansed. Is this not the ultimate of secular worship? Of course in all religious systems faith and its maintenance is frequently in jeopardy. Our deification of the machine is no longer absolute. The worm of doubt is at work. But who is ready to give up the beloved flivver or to join the AA (`Automobilists Anonymous'). Lest I be charged with spreading apostasy, I should add the attachment to the machine is more of an addiction than a religion and therefore a more persistent habit. It is easier to backslide from one's faith than to give up an addiction cold turkey. Who, after all, wants to walk?

PEOPLE KEEP MOVING

As already noted, daily travel is now common between small and large centres. Though jobs tend to be concentrated in the larger centres many employees seek out the supposed advantages of country living and cheaper housing. Teachers, nurses, employees in small business are no longer required to live near their place of work. This causes another rift in the fabric of community life. Let me choose the teacher to illustrate the consequences to community life of the commuting phenomenon. The teacher is now less likely to live in the community, to know much of the child's home life, or to meet socially the children, their parents, or others active in setting the tone of community life. At one time the resident teacher was often a strong community leader but now is likely, as a commuter, to have divided loyalties. Besides, commuting takes time out of the working day and saps energy.

Commuting also resulted in allowing local residents to seek employment and to develop relationships far beyond the boundaries of locality. Now large numbers of former urban dwellers have moved to the country either to retire or to continue their urban employment. These new ruralites have different lifestyles. Quite often, at least in the first few years, they have little commitment to community activities. If they remain in the community, they may get involved and begin to assume responsibilities of leadership. But unlike the descendants of the original settlers, they are likely to move on. Career opportunities and the prevailing rootlessness of modern life draw them away. This separation of the "new" from the "old" families is accentuated if the newcomers feel superior, or sense hostility, or if local activities follow traditional lines they do not appreciate. The cleavage is often prolonged unnecessarily by old families who are unwilling to make accommodations to the new ruralites. I refuse to call them ex- urbanites. In many cases churches close down because the two elements cannot come together. Elsewhere I see churches and other local activities thrive where the two find ways to cooperate

Not all new ruralites are commuters. A few back-to-the-landers move in , as well as artists, consultants and others who can carry on their work at home interspersed by occasional trips to the city. I do not imply that salt and the automobile are wholly responsible for these changes. Other factors are rural electrification, garbage pick up, municipally financed hockey arenas (inexplicably called community centres) mammoth

high schools surrounded by a spider web of school bus routes, and more or less standardized social services. Of all these, rural electrification may have had the most far- reaching impact. It not only accelerated the industrialization of agriculture but allowed the adoption of electrically driven household appliances once the exclusive privilege of town and city dwellers. With all these so called labour-saving devices I find it hard to understand why rural people now have less leisure time for the community. At any rate, there are multiple reasons why urban people move to the country and why rural people choose to stay there. For whatever reason, the age-long phenomenon of rural depopulation has been reversed. We now find a new and unfamiliar mix in our countryside, though with reduced numbers of farm people.

If we classify settlements up to 10,000 as rural, (not the absurd cut off at 1000 maintained by Statistics Canada), we will find rural population growth is almost as rapid as the urban. While towns and villages have grown, the most rapid rate of growth is in the open country, in many cases on our best farm land. Such population shifts have economic, social, and ecological causes and consequences. The resulting interplay of all these factors adds up to a profound change in the culture of rural Ontario.

Life in Ontario is no longer devoted primarily to serve farmers, nor does it centre around the Saturday night towns that I knew as a teenager. Oh the attraction, at times seeming to be fatal, of watching and even trying to date girls from the next town! Oh, the precious recollections! We now have villages with the largest population in their history that are stripped of their institutions, centres that serve as little more than dormitories for most of its residents while a few old families struggle to keep the community alive. We now have towns and townships deeply divided on many issues. Polarities develop on issues like land use, the prevalence of pesticides, animal rights, school and recreation programs and so on. Some of these issues are not peculiar to rural areas but in the country fewer people are involved. Quarrelling with neighbours can leave scars that are slow to heal. As a consequence, decisions tend to be avoided long after they should have been faced. We also have townships where the long-term residents are outnumbered by commuters, weekenders and cottagers. These newcomers often field their own slates for the municipal council. They then begin to call the shots, an outcome of dispossession all too familiar to our native people. The word "neighbour" hardly applies in communities where people living on the same road are not even nodding acquaintances. We now have some small towns with an enclave of boutiques and upscale restaurants designed to attract tourists, with another enclave offering more conventional services to the year-round resident. The result is a kind of apartheid where two systems occupy the same space.

THE ALTERED FRAMEWORK OF RURAL CULTURE

The flow of human activity is controlled and managed to a very large extent by customs and institutions (legal, economic, social and religious). All these structural arrangements provide a culture with a framework within which life goes on. Much of this behaviour is learned in the early stages of life, some of it in the first months, like language

and the subtle imprint of how to give and receive affection. In a stable society where change is measured and slow, this early learning is useful and relevant throughout life. In a society where change is rapid, even chaotic, the individual must go through a series of adjustments in work and social skills as well as in standards of dress, civility and vocabulary. Another destabilizing factor is mobility, movement up or down in the social class, change of residence from place to place, even from country to country. Many do adjust, often gratefully, to changes in technology, job skills, and place of residence. It is my impression that we hold more tenaciously onto values, standards of right and wrong, taste and preference. This is to say that norms governing behaviour change more quickly than moral judgements that evaluate behaviour. The result is stress and guilt felt by the individual, stress between generations, social classes, ethnic groups, genders, and most fatefully between tribe and country. Needless to say, rural Ontario offers no refuge from the emotional impact of change. No doubt each rural resident responds to this stress in a different way. Some welcome the challenge. Some choose to follow some kind of fundamental dogma. Some retreat in bitterness and nostalgia. Some write poetry and fiction, sharing their pain and vision. Some study the issues and write papers. Some enter politics. Some involve themselves in some kind of action, locally or beyond. Some are constrained by circumstances or personal chance to limit themselves to the intimacy of home and family. The majority, however, it seems to me, choose to do nothing beyond the scramble to make ends meet financially. Perhaps it is not a choice rationally made but results from the relentless pressure of consumerism, and the restlessness imposed by a rootless, materialistic and spiritually impoverished society. Space here does not permit a detailed examination of the impact of change on rural institutions and organizations. I will list only a few of the categories on which a more penetrating analysis could fix its attention.

family life
marketing and production arrangements
women's organizations
youth activities and attitudes
banking and credit
recreation preferences
law enforcement and the distribution of justice
care of the aged and handicapped
the extent of poverty and the status of the poor
religious organizations and spiritual concerns
practices related to the environment

Each topic and many more that could be listed suggest the pervasive nature of culture. Each topic could justify a major study, which if taken together, would provide a detailed account of the impact of change in rural Ontario. It should be noted that in every case a prevailing trend has had impact on all of the aspects of rural life listed in the preceding paragraph. I refer to the centralization of control of local institutions accompanied by their eventual disappearance.

The school system can be taken as an example. In the township were I grew up there were 14 school sections, each with three trustees and a secretary-treasurer. Fifty- six local citizens, admittedly all males at

that time, assumed without recompense, often without gratitude, responsibility for the education of their children. Today there is one school board for a large county, while our township shares a trustee with two other townships. A slide from 56 to .3 represents, in my judgement, a significant loss of local autonomy, a shrinking of political influence and a loss of power. Moreover, a cluster of highly trained and highly paid officials preside over the schools of the county with whom elected officials and parents, even teachers and principals, have limited influence.

This look at the structure which has evolved after the advent of snowploughs and salt in highway maintenance does not reflect on the final `product'. I choose this commercial word deliberately since I hear it used frequently as a reference to the human beings who pass through the school system. As a teacher, I never felt I was producing something, and I suspect few teachers see their students as means to some exterior end determined by the state and its bureaucrats. But I do ask: is there no better way to prepare young people for adulthood? I am sure human imagination could suggest other options. What is significant is the way gigantism (bigger is better) has determined the size of school buildings and the administrative structures that administer them. Even if we concede that large schools with 1,000 or more students are a necessity in large cities, why does it follow that rural areas must follow? That this is so demonstrates how urban standards and practice can intrude into a rural situation is an inappropriate and ultimately destructive way. The question of the capacity of the school system to prepare children and youth for the uncertainties that they must soon face can not be limited to the narrow band of questions centred on the curriculum as current debate tends to do. Even so, I can not suppress the question, even though it is probably unanswerable statistically: is the rate of school dropouts and functional illiteracy any better today than it was 60 years ago?

I have a broader concern. It is the negative consequences of centralization and bureaucratization of our institutions. I point not only to schools, but to grocery stores, banks, implement dealers, factories, post offices, libraries, municipal councils and even churches. I like to call them Great Associations. These are hierarchically structured organizations with a diminishing distribution of power and responsibility in the descent from top to bottom. The mandate or jurisdiction of each Great Association is specific and therefore limited while the individual and indeed the community is a total system. In medicine we see the dehumanizing effects of high specialization. For instance, my eye doctor was unaware of my deafness even though my hearing aid was only a few centimetres east of the eye she was concentrating on. Even in the rare instances where holistic medicine is practiced, the client has other needs that the physician does not have the skill or even the right to meet. By the same token, the branch plants or outposts of the Great Associations, because of their limited jurisdiction, tend to fragment community or to pretend that the outpost is a community. Churches, schools, and even some factories (following the Japanese) often try to create that fiction. There is no objection to a social or economic group attempting to create a family-like or community-like atmosphere, but the trend is objectionable if it excludes neighbours or forfeits too large a share of autonomy to a distant headquarters. The visible result is the

closing down of facilities and their relocation in larger centres, or in the case of factories, to other countries. Churches alone seem to be most resistant to this trend. Solitary churches may still be found in the open country. There are a few hamlets, I call them Mighthavebeenvilles, that have a church even when all other services have disappeared. I suggest that this occurs because, despite their lowly position in hierarchical structures, the local congregation retains a measure of autonomy, perhaps because it relies largely on voluntary support and local dollars.

As we look at rural Ontario beneath the visible physical changes of closure and relocation, the bumping together of municipalities and service centres, there are psychological consequences resulting from loss of power, the disregard of local myth and legend, and the loss of opportunity for people to occupy common territory and to meet and practice the arts of neighbourhood. These trends have systematically destroyed community. Now I must declare a bias. I believe community is a value. It is a deprivation to live in a state of isolation and alienation. Without thriving local institutions democracy is a hollow facade. Moreover, I believe it is costly and inefficient to try to maintain a society without a web of localities with rights, responsibilities and obligations for decision-making.

VALUES THAT DRIVE US

What is responsible for current trends and for the impotence and bewilderment that seem to grip our society? To blame politicians is a lazy cop-out. We deserve our politicians. The search for responsibility must examine the values that explain and justify what we do. Cultures are not smooth running machines. They do have flaws, sometimes fatal ones as archaeologists who dig up their remains, their bones or their tools can testify. The bones indicate that the ancients were not all that different from us. They had about the same amount of space for brains. Their tools much simpler than ours. What a pile of junk future archaeologists, who dig up our leavings, will discover. Perhaps they will conclude we had too many tools. Will they surmise we gave our brains a holiday, while the tools worked, calculated, and eventually thought for us?

The utility of values in holding a culture together has been stated repeatedly in the preceding pages. Actually I cannot conceive of a society sustaining itself, or of an individual functioning effectively without values. Unfortunately "value" is an inadequate word to describe that force in a social order that explains the world we live in, that justifies our everyday existence and gives it meaning. Important as values are, they are by no means as easy to identify as the solid artifacts of a technology or the social structures and institutions within which we exist, work and play, from day to day, from birth to death.

Ruth Benedict in her study of Pueblo Indians reports how succinctly an old man describes the ravages of change among his people. He said "For us the cup of life is broken." He seemed to be saying that what was once valued no longer had any value. There was no longer a common table where a ceremonial cup was passed from lip to lip, thus binding people together. I do not suggest rural Ontario has suffered the devastating blows native

societies have sustained and survived; nevertheless I resonated to the old man's pain when I came upon this account 50 years ago, a pain experienced once again writing this paper. The rural communities I know have no ceremonial cup but a few are beginning to fashion one, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

Not all values have the same weight in a society such as ours. There is conflict and confrontation, each destructive force justified by its own system of beliefs and practices. These are often contradictory. For example, as an adult educator working out of Macdonald College back in the early 1940's, I was addressing a group of farmers in Pontiac County, Quebec. I was promoting the idea of a marketing and buying cooperative. One old farmer in a kindly way had this to say: "It won't work. Farmers won't stick together. I remember an old neighbour telling me: 'I know of no feeling of satisfaction to equal the way I feel when I wake up in the middle of the night, hear the rain pattering on the roof, knowing my hay is in the barn, and my neighbour's is out'." Everyone laughed, nodding their heads in agreement. Yet they agreed when I pointed out that if the unlucky neighbour broke his leg, everyone would turn out to help. Now this account indicates a veritable constellation of values: the virtue of hard work and good management, uncharitable attitudes toward others and individualistic behaviour that is counter-productive in the long run. This pattern of contrary values mutually intermeshed, I am sure, persists today in farming circles, community groups and business.

The child very early on learns to incorporate these and other contradictory values. They are learned at the breakfast table (who'll be first to finish the porridge?), in the classroom, and even with races at a Sunday school picnic. A society begins to fall apart when the rules change without notice, when for instance those who work the hardest go broke, when the scholarship student is out of a job. That is when a condition of anomie infects the minds of more and more people, especially the younger. It is a condition of rootlessness, and of being disconnected from others and from ongoing events, a condition that obtains when the promises and assumptions commonly accepted as truth turn out in reality to be false. Such promises are implicit in advertising. We are told that hard work leads to success; machines make life easier; more money provides more leisure and more happiness; the right soap or beer, or perfume, or even vacation can lead to romance. All such promises enclose common assumptions about what is true and beautiful. They are the bearers of instruction about accepted values. When cultural promises are repeatedly broken, the cup of life is shattered.

The contradictions that are embedded in assumptions about competition and cooperation are repeated in other spheres. They appear in common proverbs like "too many cooks spoil the broth", and "many hands make light work". Such aphorisms are quoted when convenient without dealing directly with their opposites. It is only when such contradictions multiply that the cup of life is broken. Then a society finds itself in a state of crisis. Not every individual is affected badly. Some ride the waves of adversity to their own advantage, gaining wealth or power because times are in flux. But the prevailing attitudes are bewilderment, questioning, scepticism, and rebelliousness. Established political parties, religious denominations and legal systems as well as the assumptions on which the

economic order are founded are called into question, their relevance challenged.

It is my view that the beliefs and values which guide our everyday lives, underpin our laws and guide our institutions constitute a system of secular religious practice. It invests material objects with powerful symbolism, but it lacks spiritual nourishment. Unfortunately, the Christian denominations, despite their diversity, have been co-opted into the support of much that threatens our civilization. It is true that voices are regularly raised against military adventures, social injustice and environmental degradation. But so far they have had little effect, perhaps because the instruments of persuasion and repression (whether subtle or brutal) are so powerful. Perhaps because the truth is silenced by a noisy barrage of show business, trivia, misleading news bites, and hysteria of so-called sporting events. Perhaps because the issues are so complex, and because of the anxiety created by conditions of employment, or lack of it. Perhaps because the masses are waiting for a Messiah, or for God to lead them out of the wilderness.

In the foregoing analysis, I have paid little direct attention to the rural sector. This is justified, I presume, because of the dominance of urban values that now reach into the remotest community, and because of the increasing power of transnational corporations and their agendas which seem to undermine regional independence and national sovereignty. My own judgement is to give those agendas low marks for they are dehumanizing and, paradoxically, grossly inefficient. I cannot believe that shipping roses from Amsterdam to Toronto makes any sense, nor does flying lettuce from Italy to Vancouver, nor does the wanton waste of soil, water and timber resources. It is my intuition that the system will collapse, that a long season of chaos lies ahead if it is not already upon us. It is for this reason I look to small units and neighbourly structures to reemerge. I call it ruralization, a program to rejuvenate rural communities and urban neighbourhoods. I believe that ultimately the massive structures that maintain our social and economic systems will crumble as we witness even now in parts of Europe, Africa and our own inner cities. Then small new ventures will begin to flower and a process of ruralization can be hoped for, even expected.

WE CAN CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF CHANGE

Many readers will view my conclusions on cultural change in rural Ontario as gloomy. I recognize that there is much love and laughter in the countryside even if the reality is close to what I have described. Regardless of how seriously one judges the current crisis, there is the mockingly persistent question of what is to be done. Can I as an individual and a citizen do anything more than pay my taxes, keep the peace, and vote (when the occasion offers) according to conscience? For me passive civility is not enough. This is perhaps a remnant of my pioneer inheritance.

I recall as a child bumping across the Saskatchewan prairie in a buckboard with my father. He noticed a break in our newly acquired and much cherished telephone line. Without hesitation he handed me the reins,

pulled out a pair of pliers and a piece of barbed wire, and in minutes made a make-shift splice. A wordless lesson in citizenship. Yet what father today, even in rural Ontario, can make such a spontaneous demonstration? Today we must use more sophisticated tools, as some of us did in the 1940's in seizing on radio broadcasting technology to develop a national adult education movement. Later in this chapter I will propose a course of action which seems to call for a new social movement, one that combines individual initiatives, yet one that is appropriate for our time and place. But first some background.

When I completed my analysis of rural change in Land and Community over six years ago I was so depressed that I debated whether there was any value in publishing it, a doubt shared by several publishers and the Canada Council. Fortunately, several departments at the University of Guelph chipped in to provide enough initial funding to put the manuscript between covers and on the market. Meanwhile, my inherent optimism kicked in making it possible to suggest that present trends could be reversed and that a rejuvenated rural society was not only necessary but possible. I chose the word "rejuvenate" in preference to "reconstruct", for it suggests an organic growth from within rather than a mechanistic operation engineered from the outside. The key to these positive feelings was the conclusion that the forces that had dismantled rural communities and disenfranchised their people had neither the will or the capacity to bring about a reversal. The foxes would not put the hens back on the roost. The hens, with the occasional rooster to proclaim the rising sun, could restore order and balance if they had the determination to do so. This resurgence of optimism resulted in an additional chapter in Land and Community entitled "Toward Community Regeneration". I suggested some alternatives that people could undertake locally. In that chapter I tried to express a belief that even though community, like the landscape, was undergoing systematic and mindless destruction there is still time to reverse that trend. I tried to say that the loss of community is as serious a blow to human wellbeing as the loss of family. My hope was revived by observing the resurgence of native societies, and the energy and sweep of feminist action. So I put together in the chapter a series of options for regeneration which rural people could consider without necessarily waiting for the government to come to the rescue. The book ended with the admonition not to wait for a messiah, for we know messiahs seldom come and how we treat them when they do.

After the book was published I soon realized it was not enough to suggest a series of options. It would have to be widely distributed and read if it was to change the direction of change. I was soon to discover in practical terms that there were enormous difficulties in reaching rural readers. There was no system to reach bookstores in small towns. Where county libraries were in place one or two copies had to do for the whole county. Getting it reviewed was another hazard. It was reviewed in a number of daily papers, dismissed with one line by the Globe and Mail, and given a short negative notice in Farm and Country. It was too rural for our "national" newspaper even though the topic concerned a third of our population and most of our land mass. It was, I suppose, too negative for a Farm and Country still wedded to the notion that farm and rural are synonymous. The reviewer challenged my statement that rural residents did not know their neighbours. Of course, farmers know other farmers in their

vicinity but do they know the non-farm residents? I think not. Certainly I did not. Of the 18 houses built since 1955 within half a mile of my farm, I knew only three owners by name and only one on a chatting, borrowing basis. The bulk of the sales of around 2500 copies went to university book stores across Canada even though it was not a conventional textbook. This gratifying response was the result of favourable reviews in sociology and geography journals. It has been widely used in theological schools where it is recognized that pastors, who now tend to be recruited from urban congregations, are ill prepared for service in rural places. I am not aware of any other professional schools (with the exception of social work) that recognize this lack. I think of law, medicine, public health, even agronomy. Welcome as sales have been to university bookstores, it stands to reason that a student who passed an exam or wrote a good paper on the contents of the book is not likely to start a social movement to rejuvenate rural society. Not immediately, anyway. Besides the new graduate, if lucky, is likely to begin by occupying a lowly chair in some bureaucracy.

It must be obvious from this lament that I believed the only way to change the direction of change in rural areas is through some kind of social movement. It must also be obvious that I was calling for a great new balancing act, a shift from urbanization to ruralization, a shift at a deep level of our culture. However, I was convinced that the stresses in our culture caused by rapid social change and economic adjustments had caused and are causing deep fissures in our social structure. Social earthquakes create chaos, an occasion for new beginnings. But as we can see in Europe and in our own cities, it is a time of drugs, guns, joblessness, strikes, and lockouts, not a time for reading books.

A few paragraphs ago I posed the question "What is to be done?" You might recognize that this is the title of a famous book written by Lenin at a time, not unlike the present, when the world was in turmoil, especially around Moscow and in Russia generally. He, unlike the general populace, had an answer to his own question. Moreover, he had a program is mind which he put into effect with alarming effectiveness. Certainly he succeeded in changing the direction of change, though it appears now that it would have been better for everyone if he had been less successful. But even if he did come up with a bad answer it does not invalidate his question. Who indeed does not ask "What is to be done?" after every newscast?

The obstacles confronting rural people who attempt to change the direction of change are formidable. We need few reminders that Ontario is a suburb of the Global Village. This statement by Henri Rousso on the culture of France applies without qualification to this province: The ubiquitous state "technology, and organized violence are only one side of the coin; the other involves the globalization of trade, the unification of the market place, the convergence of peoples' outlook over a larger portion of the planet".

If France with its history dating back to Julius Caesar and Charlemagne is being swallowed by the global dragon what chance does Ontario have to maintain a cultural identity? It seems to me, therefore, that any effort to stimulate community rejuvenation should stress history

as well as local history to establish an awareness of rural values and enhance a sense of personal worth. This strategy seems to make more sense because of the new diversity among rural residents. The new ruralites and the old families could establish mutual bonds by looking back. Indeed the young people from old families could benefit from examining their origins, having been carted hither and yon on school buses far from the neighbourhoods fashioned by their ancestors. Indeed, pride of place can do much more than enhance one's personal identity. It has an impact, as Tony Hiss has pointed out, "on the way we feel and act, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, the way we interact with other people, even our ability to function as citizens of a democracy". I have already stressed the role of tradition in the construct of culture Henri Rousso uses a much more vivid concept, "social memory", which is the living history that people carry around in their heads. It is a more dynamic concept than custom or tradition for it selects reassuring stories and submerges or distorts painful ones out of which poets, pundits and politicians play their own tunes and sing their own songs. I suppose the social memory we chose to suppress or forget are the hardships of pioneer days, the hanging of Louis Riel at the behest of the then powerful Orangemen of Ontario, the relocation or Japanese-Canadians after Pearl Harbour, and the treatment of those who lived here before Europeans "discovered" the place we now call our own.

I found Rousso's analysis of the postwar history of France surprisingly relevant to rural Ontario. He suggests that the abject surrender of the French troops to the Nazi-led armies of Germany and the collaborative record of the Vichy regime under Marshall Petain were events the French people and their leaders refused to deal with by glossing over the disgrace with misleading myths. As a consequence, the bravery and deaths of the resistance underground who never accepted defeat tend to be ignored. The resulting polarities have yet to be resolved in a country that is still divided. He applauds a new generation of historians and sociologists, along with film producers, who are telling what really happened. The same struggle to uncover repressed memories and unexpressed grief is going on in Germany, Japan and even in the United States. Unfortunately, the dark patches in our own cultural story have not yet been adequately dealt with here in Ontario and specifically in each community that has a name and a history. We prefer the ringside seats from which to watch with self-righteous amusement the agonies of Watergate, Vietnam, and the scramble to find out who planned this assassination and that fraud.

I do not see any possibility of establishing a balance between rural and urban, between first nations and the rest of us, between male and female, until we deal with the black holes in our collective memories. Frank exchange and listening are called for from all concerned, not confrontation and blame. This process must be the foundation of community regeneration and the validation of rural values. How to begin and where to begin are the leading questions before a social movement can be launched.

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begin are the leading questions before a social movement can be launched.

In searching for a way to initiate such an objective I found myself rejecting most of the reputable agencies and great associations that have an interest in rural people. If the aim is to rejuvenate a holistic entity that includes everyone (my notion of community), then it is difficult to see how a church or a women's organization or a municipal council could sponsor such action without alienating some citizens. But why not leave it to the government to start things rolling? In my view governmental agencies by reason of their specialized and jurisdictionally limiting function would tend to promote their own agendas in any community where their representatives would operate. Indeed, the choice of a community to work in would be dictated by those policies. The field representative would also be inhibited by a foreknowledge of a distant supervisor's preferences, who in turn could be expected to evaluate field work with criteria consonant with the overall objectives of the department rather than those of a small community. I can hear the deputy minister of health, if it is brought to his or her attention, asking why our boy up in Bruce County is promoting tourism and someone in the tourist bureau answering "why indeed?"

Let the community set its own agenda. Let it draw on outside resources available from government and universities but first put its own house in order. Given the new mix present in so many rural communities, the citizens need to know one another before deciding whether or not any action is necessary or possible.

It seemed to me in assessing a way to stimulate a social movement that an agency was called for to promote the idea of self-examination and regeneration without attaching preconditions or goals to the exercise. The Ontario Rural Learning Association, an organization long in the field of adult education, seemed to me to have the neutrality and the prestige to take on this task. It was once a farm organization. At its inception in 1965 it combined the Ontario Folkschool Council and several hundred Farm Radio Forums. It was now a general rural organization reaching out to town, village and countryside. I will admit to a certain bias since I have been a member since the beginning, and its president in the early 1980's. At least I had access to the board with whom I had shared early drafts of Land and Community. I suggested to the board that my book made a general statement. It was important now to test its findings against actual local situations. The first impulse was to promote a series of community surveys but this presented technical and financial obstacles. A survey takes time and calls for expertise. Reports are slow to produce, expensive and seldom read. They are likely to be written in the obscure language of sociologists, a habit I have struggled to avoid. What was called for was a formula for a simple survey carried on by the people themselves, a first step toward some kind of local action, an attempt to change the direction of change.

What emerged from these cogitations was the notion of Community Soundings. Why not take a sounding as navigators do when negotiating uncharted waters? Who would deny we are all heading downstream without knowing what lies ahead? Sounding has another meaning. It could be an occasion to sound off, or to sound happy, sad, hopeful or apprehensive, a chance for neighbours to hear the sound of each other's voices and opinions, possibly, for the first time.

It was agreed that a Sounding had to be enjoyable, easy to organize and manage, perhaps nothing more than a one day event. It should be neutral so as not to exclude any group or opinion. It should emphasize learning from each other how we perceive our community, how it has changed, and what, if anything, we wish to do about or with the place. The board of the Rural Learning Association liked the idea. It began at once to hold a series of experimental Soundings in centres where its members were known so that a local sponsoring committee could be convened to make arrangements, find a place to meet, and ensure a turnout. It should be a neutral location in which everyone in the area would feel comfortable. The size of venue should be large enough to allow small groups to form, and to contain a display without having large empty spaces. The display should contain local artifacts, as well as historical writing, and valued objects linked to the past. Ideally the school should be involved in the planning, with a senior grade helping with the display, with distributing posters and in helping with arrangements at the Sounding.

The display should be set up in a suitable place like a school, library, church or recreation centre a day or so in advance for public examination. Ideally, the school should have access to it. On the day of the meeting the doors are wide open well in advance for viewing, registration, conversation and refreshments. Name tags are provided with different colours showing length or residence in the community. There is music, live or recorded, to set a mood of enjoyment and participation.

The local convenor starts things off by explaining the purpose of the Sounding and by introducing the animator or facilitator who begins by identifying who is present. There is an interesting cross section in age, occupation, and years of residence in the community. The environment is lively and cheerful with everyone moving about freely. The animator asks for a circle and for everyone to move about to make new acquaintances or to renew old ones. Then chairs are arranged in a circular or horse-shoe fashion and the animator enlarges on the Sounding idea having arranged for a brisk, very brief talk on the rural crisis and stressing the nature of the process. A video is available if a speaker cannot be arranged.

The animator then moves the discussion through three very simple but profound questions. The first two call for positive and negative perceptions of the community as it is today. Almost everyone can be expected to contribute to both questions, thus avoiding polarities at the beginning.

In the many Soundings I have observed the exchange between young and old, old- timers and new residents, has been especially fruitful. The former have cherished memories and may even be teased into recalling

something negative that should have been put in the historical record had it not been deemed shameful. The list of positive and negative responses in every case is long and a learning experience for everyone as the lists are more varied than any one person would have compiled. It is not systematic but an enlightening reconnaissance of a place shared by most of those present. I have heard old-timers confess they regret their failure to welcome newcomers, and newcomers express their attachment to the place and how they welcome this opportunity to get involved. The third stage goes much deeper, though the animator must recognize the need for an emotional response, and an understandable possibility of avoidance. The question asks if there is anything sacred in this community that participants would be willing to defend, even at personal risk or expense. It is time now for small groups. It is easier to take risks in small groups, to temporarily silence the talkers who often dominate larger assemblages. It is important to hear from the timid. In the Soundings already held the range of responses has been surprising; they range from personal hobby horses to water and the land to concern about planning. The probing generated by these three questions typically identifies a number of problems.

When the third question has been fully explored it may be time for the animator who is usually an outsider (with previous experience in group leadership), to step down and call on the local convenor to take over. Now the question moves to action. Are we prepared to do anything about our problems? Which one should be given priority?

It would be useful now to examine the role of the animator. The leader should have the necessary skills which are not just those of a conventional discussion leader. On the whole an outsider is preferred. In seeking closure between all the varied interests likely to be found in the community, it is essential to have a neutral person guiding the exploration. There is an advantage in not knowing the sensitive topics that a local leader might try to avoid. Moreover, an outsider can register genuine excitement as the image of the community unfolds. I have used two different labels for leader: animator and facilitator. Both are appropriate at different stages of the proceedings. The animator gets the process moving but having done so should lapse into a less energetic more passive pose, that of a facilitator.

In some respects the Sounding is an exercise in group therapy in which the community is the patient and those local citizens present are the interns under the guidance and encouragement of the facilitator who encourages them to dig into their own memories and feelings about their community. Consequently, the facilitator must be non-judgemental and must refrain from espousing any one cause, and must be skilled at quick summaries without anticipating conclusions or hinting at solutions. In the process each person present begins to see the place through the eyes of an outside facilitator and to assume a measure of ownership for its uniqueness and its problems. It is not easy to help two old adversaries (and what community doesn't have any) to really hear one another. It is a breakthrough when one says "I hear what you are saying even if I don't agree". Then the group is on the road to compromise and consensus.

Without this, without closure, without a gestalt in which the whole

exceeds the sum of its parts, there is no possibility of a community setting its own agenda. With consensus a vision for the future can be fashioned. In this way a Sounding can help a community to plot a course for its own regeneration.

In conclusion, I do not suggest that the Sounding method is the only way to animate a rural community. I hope it is one useful model, though dozens of other approaches are being used effectively. However, these efforts are still too few, too little recognized, too little, and just possibly too late. It is essential to believe that goodness and good sense will prevail. We will survive only if more of us refuse to appear as anonymous faces in the lonely crowd or as disenfranchised dots in the global village. Ontario is our place. Here we can become lively members of the human family. Here we can dream and work to create a vital culture in a healthy environment. Here the rural have much to give.

Thus we change the world as Northrop Frye has suggested, out of the present:

> This present is a resurrection
> which is not the reviving of a corpse
> and a rebirth
> which is not an emerging
> of a new life
> from a dying older body
> to die in its time.
> It is rather a transfiguration
> into a world we keep making
> even when we deny it.
> As though a coral insect
> were suddenly endowed
> with enough consciousness
> and vision to be able to see
> the island it has been helping
> to create.

EPILOGUE

My first experience of community, and of myself as a person, was in a prairie neighbourhood in pre-World War I Saskatchewan. There I absorbed a diversity of cultures among neighbours who came from Norway, Aberdeenshire in Scotland, a man from Iowa we called a Yankee, and several families like my own who had come from rural Ontario. In one sense the outside world was a chimera; in another sense it was reflected in our varied accents and vocabularies. It was present in "the old country" homeland of the Nelsons and Beatties or "down east", the place of grandparents, uncles, aunts and the source of letters and the cause of tears. All of this revolved about my small person in a space that despite its flatness I perceived as a shallow saucer. It was a world by itself where we knew everyone. It had no visible centre except the school where we had church services in summer and box socials in winter. It had a cemetery with only two or three graves and a post office which was in our kitchen. At the outer rim of the saucer, ten miles distant, shimmered the grain elevators and the trains that snaked along its edge. It was a place which we abandoned when I was six years old to rejoin uncles and aunts in Ontario, to a place

where I learned about God, Queen Victoria, the sower who went forth to sow, taxes, mortgages, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and war. In both places I learned to be a Canadian in spite of Queen Victoria and the influence of Jim Barr, our Yankee neighbour. I call this community a place, but it is more; it is something in the head. As Melville wrote in Moby Dick, "It was not down on any map, true places never are." I share this childhood experience to make a point. Every adult bears the imprint of childhood wherever and however it was received into the flesh, into the head and blood. From one standpoint each Ontarian carries around in his or her thinking a concept of Ontario, even though the extent or accuracy of their knowledge will be very uneven. By another dimension the culture of Ontario contains the sum total of those perceptions plus those held by others outside the province. It is intriguing to speculate on the interface between individual perceptions and the total, especially when the system is rapidly changing. There is a continuous dual action at work in which culture forms attitudes and a predisposition to act in a certain way, which we as actors transmit, reproduce and modify in our daily coming and going. We, the people, matter if change is to be redirected into more humane and ecologically sensitive channels. These personal transactions add up, after the positive and negative impulses are taken into account, to produce a final tally of the culture. It is a continuous unfolding at all the different levels of consciousness which helps to determine what we think and what we do. Yet each transaction has a quality that has an impact on the total fluid movement and shift within the culture. In a real way every transaction, whether in the marketplace or in the bedroom, has a moral component. That is to say there is a difference between helping a crippled old lady across a busy street and the act of snatching her purse while pushing her in front of a moving automobile. In Ontario there are millions of social transactions every hour which represent the quality of life in Ontario.

I wish to translate this interplay between what I do to Ontario, and what Ontario does to me. I will use the gestalt concept of figure and field which in an illustration shows identical profiles of two persons facing each other. At first glance the viewer sees a vase. It is a figure surrounded by a black area which is the field. When seen the other way the two black profiles represent a figure while the white area between and behind them is the field. In life I can be so alienated and self-absorbed as a figure that there is in effect no defining field surrounding me. My personality lacks substance. In modern life there are numberless occasions when I am nobody. When alone watching television or in a dark cinema watching a movie, when I am one of 40,000 watching the Blue Jays, I am submerged by the field. As the occasions multiply when I am a nameless dot in a mass event, or a number on a computer, the risk of social collapse increases. The individual gets lost in the mass. It is all field and no figure. Community provides a field on which the person is a significant figure. For this reason community is an essential element in the construct of an adequate person. By extension, community is a bridge to the regional culture and to the world. In community I am a well defined figure in a receiving and caring field while I serve as an element in my neighbour's field. There is a fundamental human need for community. I recall when my children were small the importance I attached to church attendance. Quite apart from an occasion for worship and spiritual renewal it seemed to be the only place where our nuclear family could be

seen and welcomed, a place where we would be missed if we did not attend. There were other places where we could be seen, in the library, at a ball game, or out shopping, but we were seldom together as a unit. All of these occasions, though much more diverse and scattered than in the pioneer settlement where I saw the light of day, provided our family with its field. For the pioneer participation in the life of the neighbourhood was a matter of survival. Today survival is still the issue, though less obviously so, and the regeneration of community life a matter of great urgency.